

The Ryerson Canadian History Readers

LORNE PIERCE, Editor

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IMPERIAL ORDER DAUGHTERS OF THE EMPIRE AND THE
PROVINCIAL DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION

DAVID THOMPSON

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3A1692
1441-31

PRICE 10 CENTS

THE RYERSON PRESS
TORONTO

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THE CAREER of some men is like that of a downy seed which drifts on the winds of the prairie to take root and flourish in some distant but congenial spot. Such, at any rate, is the suggestion of David Thompson's life. Born in poverty in London in 1770 and left an orphan at two years of age by the death of his father, who was buried at the cost of the parish, he received through charity the rudiments of a mathematical education in the famous Grey Coat School, within a few minutes' walk of Westminster Abbey. Writers have smiled at the antiquated textbooks prescribed for his use, forgetful, perhaps, that English schools lay little stress upon textbooks and rely upon the teacher and the atmosphere of the school and classroom. True it is, that young David learned lessons in piety and sobriety which remained with him all through his life; that from those early days his mind was wide awake to the world around him and that his training in mathematics, slight as it was, prepared him for a distinguished career as geographer and surveyor. What chance was there that the

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orphan child should take root in the crowded soil of London and develop his powers to maturity? Very little. The lad's fate was determined by the chance winds of the business world of that day. When he was but fourteen years of age, the Hudson's Bay Company turned to his school, as it apparently did from time to time, to find promising boys for apprentices. Thus it came about that David Thompson passed on the good ship "Prince Rupert" through the floating ice of Hudson's Strait to distant Rupert's Land, there to find himself rooted in a soil fertile for his genius. The Company had at this time a good surveyor in Philip Turnor, and probably intended to arrange that he should train Thompson for future exploration in their extensive domain.

In the beginning of September, 1784, David Thompson, then no more than an intelligent lad of fourteen, landed at the Fort Churchill of that time. Two years before, during that phase of the American War of Independence in which the French were supporting the colonists and had momentarily wrested from Britain the supremacy of the sea, Fort Prince of Wales, the stone

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DAVID THOMPSON ON HIS WINTER JOURNEY THROUGH THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS, 1810. HE AND HIS MEN TRAVELED ON SNOWSHOES. SLEDS DRAWN BY DOGS CARRIED THE FOOD AND EQUIPMENT OF THE PARTY. THREE PACK HORSES WERE USED ALSO UNTIL THE SNOW BECAME TOO DEEP.

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fort on the north point of the estuary of the Churchill River, had been captured by the famous French navigator, Admiral de la Pérouse, and its inmates, including the Governor, Samuel Hearne of Coppermine River fame, had been taken prisoners to France. The Hudson's Bay Company forthwith abandoned the cumbersome and untenable fortress, and built a new post on the spot five miles farther up the estuary, at present occupied by their Fort Churchill. Here, in buildings not yet completed, cold and comfortless, and apparently with little but odd jobs to occupy him, Thompson spent his first winter. But his mind was wide awake, for in his *Narrative* of his explorations, he tells us much of the geology of the region, of various natural phenomena, such as the frost splitting the rocks with a clap like thunder, and of the different species of birds and animals which frequented those parts in summer and winter.

Next year Thompson was transferred to York Factory at the mouth of the Hayes River and hard by the estuary of the Nelson River, where he played the part of an apprenticed clerk. Life at this post must have been

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altogether to his taste, for during the season when there was little or no business at the post, he was out with his fellow servants shooting geese and trapping rabbits to lay up a store of provisions for the table of the factory. Here again his interest in natural phenomena, in the different species of birds and beasts and their ways, and in the customs of the natives of the place, is writ large on the pages of his *Narrative*. In fact, we can see already the Thompson of after-times, a man of acute observation, absorbed in the study of Nature and of his fellow men. After the year at this factory, when he might be said to be acclimatized and trained in the routine of a fur trade post, he was listed for service "inland" in posts subject to the keen rivalry of the fur-traders from Montreal.

In the previous years the whole situation in Rupert's Land had changed for the Hudson's Bay Company. Fur-traders from the St. Lawrence had come up by way of the Ottawa River and the Great Lakes and were diverting to Montreal and so to England the rich stream of furs which had been going down for more than half a century from the

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Saskatchewan to York Factory by the Bay. To save their trade, the Hudson's Bay Company had sent in Samuel Hearne to build Cumberland House close to the Saskatchewan (1774). It was near the meeting place of this river and the waterway which came down by the Sturgeon Weir River from the Churchill and was intended to check the operations of the Montrealers on the Saskatchewan and at the same time to prevent the Indians who took their furs down the Churchill to Fort Churchill from coming down to trade with them. Philip Turnor surveyed two possible routes from York Factory to this inland post, the one by the Nelson and Grass Rivers and Cranberry Portage, with which Thompson was later to become familiar, and the other, the route adopted, viz., by the Hayes River, Knee and Oxford Lakes and by stream and portage to Playgreen Lake, Lake Winnipeg and the Saskatchewan. This move into the interior did not achieve its object, for in 1775 and subsequently, men from Montreal, in particular Joseph and Thomas Frobisher and Peter Pond, passed beyond Cumberland House to Churchill River and to Isle-a-la-

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Crosse and began diverting the furs which went down to Fort Churchill to the trade route whose far end was Montreal. Moreover, the Canadians were up the Saskatchewan near the present A la Corne, where they could tap the furs before they reached the English company at Cumberland House. The result was that the Hudson's Bay Company had to follow its rivals farther and farther inland from beaver region to beaver region. When Peter Pond was at Fort Sturgeon, opposite the present Prince Albert, Turnor was at (upper) Hudson House on the edge of the forest and prairie some forty miles farther up. The competition was of the keenest. To meet so strong a rival as the Hudson's Bay Company and to solve their problems of transportation, the men from Montreal combined to form the North West Company (1784). By 1787, this "concern" had absorbed all its rivals from Canada, so that the traders from the St. Lawrence presented an unbroken front to the English company. Moreover, their system of making the chief "winterers" in the interior proprietors in the "concern" and of keeping the way open for their best clerks

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to rise to be “wintering partners,” gave them a co-ordination and efficiency which has never been equalled in the Canadian North West, and which placed the Hudson’s Bay Company, with its salaried servants independent of and often hostile to one another at a great disadvantage. Such was the situation when David Thompson was listed in 1786 for service “inland.”

“Fited out with a trunk, a handkerchief, shoes, shirts, a gun, powder and a tin cup,” on July 22, the lad of sixteen, with forty-six other Englishmen, started up the Hayes River route in charge of Robert Longmore, one of the most experienced of the Company’s servants. He passed beyond Cumberland House and up the Saskatchewan to the frontier post, the Buckingham House of that time, situated above Battleford, not far from the point where the Canadian National Railway now crosses to the south bank of the river. A Montreal trader, Peter Pangman, who was to become a wintering partner of the North West Company next year, was in Turtle Fort about ten miles up the river and about a mile and a half below Turtle Lake River, while Edward Umfreville, a former

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Hudson's Bay servant, was upholding the cause of the North West Company some eighty miles still farther upstream. To meet this opposition the Hudson's Bay Company were proposing to abandon Buckingham House and establish themselves yet farther up the river. Accordingly Thompson's party went up to a point about three miles above The Big Gully, north of the present Maidstone, Saskatchewan, cleared the ground and built Manchester House. When competition was as keen as it was here, it was the custom to send servants out with goods to meet the Indians in their tents and even to winter with them in order to secure their friendship and their furs. It is a sign that Thompson had already approved himself to his officers that he was detailed to cross the plains and winter with the powerful tribe of Peigans on the Bow River in the neighbourhood of the present Calgary. He spent the winter months in the tent of an old chief, Saukamappee by name. It must have been a monotonous task for a lad of seventeen, however sober-minded, but it is a sign that Thompson had an intellect awake to Nature and to human life, that he gathered informa-

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tion in that Indian tent which is of the greatest interest and importance to the historian to-day.

Thompson's career entered a new phase in the autumn of 1789. He was detailed, along with Peter Fidler, one year his senior, to Cumberland House where Philip Turnor, the surveyor, also was posted. This arrangement must have been made to train the two young men in "practical astronomy" with a view to future surveys. Thompson made the most of the opportunity. From this winter until he left the Upper Country in 1812, he kept a long succession of meteorological records and astronomical observations for longitude and latitude, while the first of his many surveys was made the very next summer when he worked out the directions and distances of the waterway from Cumberland House to Lake Winnipeg and York Factory as he went down with the furs by the route which his teacher had surveyed some sixteen years before. He returned to spend a second winter with his master at Cumberland House. In 1791-2 Turnor surveyed the route by the Churchill River to Isle-a-la-Crosse and wintered with the Northwesters on Lake

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Athabasca at the old Fort Chipewyan. From this as a centre he surveyed to Great Slave Lake and, what is of importance to us, to the eastern limit of Lake Athabasca. Thompson meanwhile wintered at York Factory. Evidently the English Company was preparing to enter the rich fur-belt of the far North West. Soon instructions arrived from the Governor and Committee in London to send Thompson and one Malcolm Ross apparently by the route to Lake Athabasca at its extreme eastern end, i.e., first by Turnor's route up the Nelson and Grass Rivers and then by the Churchill River and Reindeer River and Lake, in fact the route explored by Thompson some years later. This policy of entering Athabasca was wise not only because that region was exceedingly rich in furs, but because memories must still have lingered among the Indians there of their former connections, direct or indirect, with the English Company at Fort Churchill; and the Englishmen would have been welcomed for old acquaintance sake, whereas when they went in ten and again twenty-five years later they were treated as complete strangers and found the utmost difficulty in making those connec-

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tions with the savages by which alone they could succeed. But one of the weaknesses in the English Company's system was that, while autocratic in form, it did not always secure implicit obedience from its officers and servants. Joseph Colen, then Governor of York Factory, did not see why an expedition should be sent to distant Athabasca when the Northwesters were gathering in the furs so near at hand as the Muskrat Country, i.e., the region of rivers, lakes and swamps between the Sturgeon Weir River on the west and the Nelson on the east, traversed by the Nelson-Grass River route. Apparently the North West Company employed the spare men after the final union of 1787 in invading what we might almost call the home region of York Factory. No less a person than William M'Gillivray was in the Rat Country in 1789-90, pouring out rum freely if only he might prevent the Indians from going to the Bay and win them to trade with his "concern." His success was immediate and great. In the face of this situation Colen believed that his first duty was to drive the Northwesters out of the Muskrat Country and save the furs for his own Company and

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particularly his own fort. Accordingly in 1792, in spite of his instructions, he ordered David Thompson into the Rat region to winter at Sipiesk Lake, west of the Nelson. Thompson must have known something of the plans of the Governor and Committee, for he made a first attempt with the slight equipment to hand at his post to reach Lake Athabasca by the Churchill River and Reindeer route. He failed because he could not find Indians who knew the way. The next year it was arranged by the Governor and Committee that Malcolm Ross and Thompson should proceed to Athabasca from Cumberland House, but somehow Thompson was sent far up the Saskatchewan to the new Buckingham House, on the north bank of the river north of our Vermilion, Alberta. Colen laid the blame on William Tomison, the "chief inland" at Cumberland House. The next year Ross and Thompson were again in the Muskrat Country opposing the Northwesters, Thompson at Reed Lake. Needless to say, he surveyed the route as he went. The following season these two men were still farther in, Ross at Fairford House on the Churchill River below the Reindeer,

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Thompson at Duck Portage by which one passed from the Burntwood River to the Churchill. This was according to the plan of Colen to drive the Northwesters out of the Rat Country and Sir Alexander Mackenzie tells us that it was entirely successful, for the Englishmen could get in their goods before their rivals. Again it would seem that Thompson knew that he was expected to go to Athabasca, for he asked Colen's permission to make a second attempt and received consent, but was given no equipment other than the slender resources which his post could supply. He explains that the European war of the time prevented the Company from securing an adequate supply of able-bodied men. Without a White Man for support, with but two Chipewyans who had no more than hunted over the region in winter and were far from expert with canoes, he launched a canoe made by his own hands, upon the waters of the Churchill, at Fairford House. It was indeed a great venture. He passed up Reindeer River and skirted the westerly shore of Reindeer Lake. To avoid the great bend in the river from Wollaston Lake, he followed a small and all too shallow

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stream. After an arduous journey he was afloat on the broad waters of Wollaston and soon running down Black River to Lake Athabasca. On the difficult return upstream he had portaged by a cascade and was being drawn in his canoe up the rapids above when the Indians fumbled at the line and had to cast him adrift. The canoe, Thompson and all, went over the falls and the expedition almost ended in disaster. Rescuing his canoe and his goods and ignoring his bodily injuries, Thompson pressed on, but soon he and his party were so near starvation that they could scarcely move onward. Fortunately they fell in with an Indian family through whom they were able to get the food to bring them back to the comfort of Fairford House.

That autumn Thompson, with Ross, built a post, Bedford House, on the west shore of Reindeer Lake. It must have been a winter of perplexity for one with his sense of honour. He was now twenty-six years old and his current contract with the Hudson's Bay Company would expire in the spring. In the last six years he had been trained to the career which entirely fitted his nature—

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that of surveyor. On the other hand, the very Company which had brought him thus far failed to afford him the field which his genius craved. It is not probable that he knew just where to lay the blame. He would, not unnaturally, conclude that there was something amiss with the system. At any rate he decided to abandon the Hudson's Bay Company and offer himself to the Northwesters. On May 28, 1797, he arrived on foot at that Company's post on Reindeer River near its outlet from the lake and on July 22 was at Grand Portage, the rendezvous of the Northwesters on Lake Superior, in time for the annual meeting of their company. Just then the North West Company had a very difficult problem before them. The treaty of Versailles, 1783, had given to the United States a boundary running along the forty-ninth parallel of latitude from the north-west angle of the Lake of the Woods, as it was supposed, to the River Mississippi. During the intervening years, Britain had continued to hold and administer in a loose way the western posts in a country which did not now legally belong to her. Jay's Treaty, in

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1794, arranged for the surrender of these posts in 1796, i.e., the year before Thompson's arrival at Grand Portage, and there was ample evidence to hand that the Americans intended, in spite of the terms of the treaty, to hamper the Montreal fur-traders who might desire to continue their traffic south of the boundary. No one knew where the line would run in the area west of the Lake of the Woods, nor what North West posts might be to the south of it. Thompson was, therefore, given the commission, altogether to his liking, to survey the region and fix the position of the various posts in relation to the boundary. Setting out from Grand Portage on August 9, he took what we may call the trunk-waterway to Lake Winnipeg, which he had surveyed on his way to Lake Superior, passed through Lakes Manitoba and Winnipegosis to the present Shoal River, then up Swan River to the Assiniboine and to the upper waters of the Red Deer River. He now came back to the Assiniboine and down its valley to Fort Espérance on the Qu'Appelle, a few miles east of the present Tantallon, Saskatchewan, and to the North West fort

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near the mouth of the Souris River. During this long journey he surveyed his course much as he had done in his Hudson's Bay days, and fixed the position of the Northwesters' forts in the region covered. He was thus filling in the gap between his former surveys and the American Boundary.

From the post near the mouth of the Souris there ran a track across the prairies to the Missouri, by whose banks that very interesting tribe, the Mandans, now had their villages. The traders used to take it to gather such furs as the Mandans might have and to observe or even take part in their lascivious ceremonies. Thompson dared the dangerous "traverse" of the prairies in the dead of the winter in order to give the River Missouri its proper place in relation to the International Boundary. He was, however, much more than a map-maker. He has given us in his *Narrative* not only an interesting account of the Mandans, but he searched out those who could give him the early history of the tribe, and gives us information of great importance for the history of that region. On February 3, 1798, he was safely back at Fort la Souris. After



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a rest of about three weeks he was off again on his mission. On foot, with his equipment on dog-sleds, he traced the course of the Assiniboine down to its confluence with the Red River at the site of our City of Winnipeg. He proceeded up the Red River to the North West post at the mouth of the River Pembina. The latitude of this post, as worked out by him, showed that it was just south of the forty-ninth parallel of latitude. It is not necessary to trace his further course in detail, but to ascertain the source of the River Mississippi he ascended the Red River and its tributary, the Red Lake River. He concluded that the mighty Mississippi had its source in Turtle Lake, though it really flows from a small lake a few miles farther south. While it may be stretching the truth a little to say, as Tyrrell, the able editor of Thompson's *Narrative*, does: "To this indefatigable but hitherto unknown geographer belongs the virtual credit of discovering the head-waters of this great river," it is a fact that Thompson exposed the error of the treaty-makers in believing that the forty-ninth parallel of latitude crossed it, and he showed that the whole course of the river is

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to the south of the line. Thompson now made his way eastward by the St. Louis River to Lake Superior at "Fond du Lac" and surveyed the shore of the lake to the Sault St. Mary and round to Grand Portage, where he arrived in time for the rendezvous in June and July. He had thus, by a remarkable journey of some two thousand miles, made within the twelve-month, more than carried out his commission and gathered the needed information for his Company.

Thompson had now perforce to combine the rôles of fur-trader and explorer, as in his Hudson's Bay days. He was sent up the Churchill and Beaver rivers to build a post at Lac la Biche. He probably first set his eyes on Charlotte Small, the half-breed daughter of a former North West wintering partner, as he passed through Isle-a-la-Crosse. During this trading season he fixed the position of posts such as Green Lake and forts George and Augustus on the Saskatchewan and defined the relation of the River Athabasca with its tributary, the Pembina, to the north branch of the Saskatchewan. On the way down to the rendezvous next summer, when at Isle-

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a-la-Crosse, he took fourteen-year-old Charlotte Small to wife in the unceremonious way dictated by a land in which there was neither church nor parson. The honeymoon trip was by canoe all the way to Grand Portage on Lake Superior and back up the Saskatchewan to Fort George, the North West Company's post across the gully from the second Buckingham House of the Hudson's Bay Company, where he had wintered, in 1793-4. He had brought with him the materials with which to make a great map of the North West, and did his first work on it in the quiet of that winter. The following spring he ascended the Saskatchewan to Rocky Mountain House, a mile and a half above its confluence with the Clearwater, and surveyed the river downwards—so much more to be added to his map.

It was Thompson's good fortune that in the Department of the Upper Forts des Prairies he was under Duncan M'Gillivray, the nephew of Simon McTavish, the agent of his Company, for M'Gillivray had taken up Sir Alexander Mackenzie's dream of leading the Northwesters into the rich fur-trade beyond the Rockies and on the Pacific

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coast. In 1800 the surveyor, still in the position of clerk, returned to Rocky Mountain House with his chief. He says: "Mr. Duncan M'Gillivray came and wintered also, to prepare to cross the mountains." M'Gillivray made two preliminary surveys that autumn—one in the direction of Athabasca Pass and the other, in Thompson's company, to the neighborhood of our Exshaw, not far from Banff and near White Man's Pass. As he was sick next spring he put Thompson in command of the expedition. The plan was to find, if possible, a pass much nearer Rocky Mountain House and the Saskatchewan, which was the water-way of the traders. Thompson went up the river some twenty-five miles and ascended Sheep, our Ram River, but found no practicable road for his horses, while the canoes could not go up-stream, for it was in flood up to the precipices which formed the outer banks. Tracking was impossible. He was back at Rocky Mountain House on June 30. Duncan M'Gillivray, however, crossed the mountains that summer, for William M'Gillivray, his brother, two years later took a map of his course over to England to show

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to the Colonial Office. We may judge the ground covered by names afterwards in use —Duncan's Mountains (the Rockies at White Man's Pass), M'Gillivray's River (the Kootenay, taken as flowing from White Man's Pass), M'Gillivray's Portage (between the Kootenay and the upper waters of the Columbia River), and M'Gillivray's Rock (in Athabasca Pass).

In the following years M'Gillivray was playing the part of agent of the Company, coming up from Montreal to preside at its annual meeting at Fort William, to which the Company had moved their rendezvous because Grand Portage was south of the International Boundary. He tells us that it did not pay to transport the furs all the way from beyond the Rockies to Montreal. Accordingly we are not surprised to find him in 1805 offering the Hudson's Bay Company £2,000 a year for the use of their short route through Hudson's Strait. Meanwhile Thompson, when not trading, had been surveying about Lesser Slave Lake and down the Peace River. In 1803 his worth to the Company was recognized by his reception into the "concern" as "wintering

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partner." In 1805, when M'Gillivray was negotiating for a free transit for the goods of his Company through some depot on Hudson's Bay, probably Fort Churchill, Thompson was sent to the Churchill River region and surveyed that waterway to within about 250 miles of the fort. Though the North West Company failed to secure a right of way for their trade through Hudson Strait, M'Gillivray went forward with his plans for crossing the Rockies. The order came first to Simon Fraser on Peace River. He established a series of forts in our northern British Columbia (1805-7) and in 1808 descended the Fraser to the sea. Thompson received his order at the meeting of the Company at Fort William in 1806, Duncan M'Gillivray in the chair. After wintering at Rocky Mountain House he passed with his family up the North Saskatchewan to its head-waters. On June 25, he crossed the "great divide" of our Howes Pass with pack horses and descended the Blaeberry River. He reached the Columbia within two miles of Moberly station on the Canadian Pacific Railway, as it is to-day, and ascending the river in a

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southerly direction, finally built Kootenae House about a mile below Windermere, the lower of the two Columbian lakes. This expedition aroused the enmity of the Peigans, for Thompson's fort would supply the Kutenais with the guns and ammunition by which alone they could stay the depredations of that tribe which secured arms at Rocky Mountain House. Indeed Thompson's party stood something of a siege in their fort and was only saved by the stoutness of his stand and by the divided councils of the Peigans.

The policy of the North West Company was to occupy the Columbia down to the sea, for Duncan McGillivray says in his *Account of the trade carried on by the North West Company* (1808) : "Not satisfied with the immense region on the eastern side of the Rocky mountains . . . they have commenced a project for extending their researches and trade as far as the South sea . . . intending at some future time to form a general establishment for the trade of the country on the Columbia river which . . . conducts to the ocean all the waters that rise West of the mountains." They knew of the

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hostile attitude of the Indians of the coast towards the Whites, due to "some ill-treatment by some American adventurers," but they believed that "this prejudice will yield to the Superior convenience of a hatchet and gun over a sharp stone and a bow and arrow." Apparently their policy was to build forts among the tribes which would welcome the trade in guns and other implements as a means to protect themselves against the Blackfoot tribes, and through these would win the friendship of nations farther and farther afield until they could safely establish themselves on the coast. This may explain not only the leisureliness of Thompson's movements, but his failing to take the direct course down to the Columbia River by the Kootenay River and Lake.

In the spring of 1808 he explored up to the source of the Columbia, crossed by "M'Gillivray's Portage" to the Kootenay (M'Gillivray's) River and down through the present States of Montana and Idaho to Kootenay Lake. He returned to his post in time to take its furs out to Rainy Lake to meet the Montreal canoes. On his return to Kootenae House in the autumn he sent his

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clerk, Finan McDonald, to build a post at the falls of the Kootenay, not very far from the Lake. In 1809, instead of following the Kootenay down to the Columbia, he crossed overland from the neighbourhood of McDonald's fort to Pend d' Oreille Lake and built his Kullyspell House on its east shore among the Flatheads, who were thus able to arm themselves with guns and win a victory over their enemies, the Peigans. The approach to the Columbia by the Pend d'Oreille River proved impossible. Strangely enough, Thompson now turned inland and built Saleesh House up the river near the present Thompson, Montana.

When the indefatigable surveyor and fur-trader reached Rainy Lake in July, 1810, with his furs, he must have found the whole situation changed. On January 23 of that year the agents of the North West Company knew that John Jacob Astor's expedition by sea round cape Horn to establish a post at the mouth of the Columbia was a certainty. On February 17 a letter of John Richardson speaks of the "dire necessity" of staying Astor's plans even by intervention at Washington. Thompson, therefore, must have

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received instructions at Rainy Lake, at all hazards to reach the mouth of the Columbia before the Americans, and to take possession of the region in the name of the King. The odds, all in his favour during these past leisurely years, were now against him. When his brigade reached the upper waters of the Saskatchewan it was dogged by the Peigans, who had been recently defeated by the Flatheads armed at Thompson's posts, and who were determined not to let any more munitions go through to their foes. Strange to say, at this critical part of the journey, Thompson was not with his canoes, but hunting provisions for them, else they might not have returned so precipitately to Rocky Mountain House. When he came in search of his brigade he, too, fled before the Peigans. An Alexander Mackenzie might have faced the hostile savages, won his way across the mountains and been at the mouth of the Columbia before the Americans. Thompson decided rather to open up a safe, if circuitous, route by Athabasca Pass, known since Duncan M'Gillivray's journey. Though he pushed over the height of land in the dead of winter with much toil and suffering, he

DAVID THOMPSON

only reached the Columbia at Canoe River on January 18. He had intended going down the Columbia—a course which would have been swift and comparatively easy. As he had only a few of his men with him and feared that so small a party would be at the mercy of the tribes by the way, he took the arduous and indirect route up to the Koote-nay river, then overland to the Pend d'Oreille and to the Spokane, on which there was now a fort. He finally reached the Columbia at the Kettle Falls. Here he was able, after some difficulty, to build a cedar canoe and at last, on July 3, was floating on the broad stream of the Columbia. When he reached its confluence with the Lewis (Snake) River he took possession of the country in the name of Great Britain. On July 15, at 1 p.m., he reached the point on which the Americans, who had been within the estuary of the river since March 22, had built their Fort Astoria. Thompson arrived flying the Union Jack in the stern of his canoe, but the Stars and Stripes was already floating on the breezes of the Oregon.

That the North West Company was determined to have the Columbia is proved by

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their frantic efforts in the autumn of 1810, i.e., while Thompson was on his way westward, to get the British Government to send a warship to anticipate the Americans, and all their efforts to gain possession of the river during the war of 1812. There is no means of knowing whether they blamed Thompson for his failure. Certain it is that next summer, after completing the survey of the whole course of the Columbia, he came down to Montreal, never to return as a Northwester. There is evidence that he would have come down in any case to embody the work of all these past years in his great map of the North West. He entered upon it Turnor's survey of Lake Athabasca and the Slave River and Lake, and his own surveys made as a servant of the Hudson's Bay Company. He added the features of Arrowsmith's map, published with Sir Alexander Mackenzie's *Voyages*, and of course the vast surveys of his own days with the North West Company. This map was hung in the banqueting hall of Fort William and was doubtless often consulted during the deliberations of the partners of the Company. It is now in

DAVID THOMPSON

Toronto, a precious possession of the Ontario Archives.

Thompson's career in Canada was the quiet one of a land surveyor. From 1816 to 1826 he was occupied as British representative on the Commission which delimited the boundary between Canada and the United States as far as the Lake of the Woods. At first his home was at Terrebonne, near Montreal. He had not abandoned his half-breed wife, as so many of the fur-traders did when they returned to the respectable society of Canada. In this home and later at Williamsburg, in the county of Glengarry, his family increased till it numbered thirteen. Like many of the fur-traders, Thompson proved unable to conserve his means when he settled in Canada. His large family and his devotion in setting his sons up in business and in paying their debts when they failed, brought him to an old age of poverty, so much so that he gratefully received loans of sums as small as two shillings and six pence. In 1848 he was writing his *Narrative*, doubtless hoping for some financial return thereby. He never parted from it and it was not published till the Champlain Society printed

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it in 1916. This narrative, interesting in itself, is of special value, in that it shows that Thompson was much more than a surveyor, for he has preserved for us much information concerning the physical features and animal life and Indian society of his day in the North West, and he gives us most precious glimpses of what was taking place on the prairies before the White Men came. It is a monument of a mind wide awake to all the world around him.

Thompson died at Longueil, near Montreal, on February 10, 1857.



(Continued from inside front cover)

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